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Guilty Verdict in Large Scale Heroin Case

After a 4 day trial and less than half a day's deliberation, on Wednesday, May 04, 2011, a Humboldt County jury found Jose Hernandez Lopez, 50, guilty of multiple drug charges involving 1.5 pounds of heroin with an estimated street value of approximately \$70,000. Lopez is an undocumented Mexican National residing in Los Angeles.

Lopez faces up to 8 years, 8 months in state prison for being found in possession of more than 14.25 grams of heroin for sale, transporting heroin and using a false compartment to store, conceal and transport the drug. Lopez was also found guilty of providing false information to law enforcement. A prior drug conviction adds a mandatory 3 years to his sentence, which will be pronounced by the Honorable Judge W. Bruce Watson on June 1, 2011. After serving his sentence, Lopez faces deportation to Mexico.

On Feb 1, 2011, Humboldt County Drug Task Force agents were conducting surveillance along the Avenue of the Giants near Phillipsville and observed Lopez traveling on a dead end road on two separate occasions. They contacted Lopez and he granted the agents permission to search his vehicle. Lopez and his three passengers waited while the vehicle was checked by a trained Humboldt County Drug Task Force K-9 (police dog). After the K-9 alerted on the center console, the agents searched the vehicle and found a hidden compartment in the console containing 1.5 pounds of black tar heroin. Lopez admitted to agents that the heroin was his and that he was hired to transport the drugs from Los Angeles to Humboldt County. He later retracted this statement.

“The evidence showed sophisticated large-scale drug trafficking of the sort which deserves the fullest application of our law enforcement resources,” noted Deputy District Attorney Maggie Fleming. “And this case shows how our Drug Task Force can effectively interdict such activity.”